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ABSTRACT

From the beginning of life, a child's acts of meaning are joint constructions, enacted through dialogue between himself and a significant other by reference to whom he is achieving a personal identity. When the child begins to control his material environment, he begins the transition to systematic symbolic construction. At the same time, he is construing his body and achieves the semiotic freedom of construing meanings into systems. This choice of meaning is the essential characteristic of protolanguage. The second major transition is from protolanguage into language, which includes grammar. The basic form of information is turning shared experience into meaning. Conversation evolves as the joint construal of shared experience, whereby phenomena accessible to both parties' consciousness are turned into meanings through dialogue. In the course of time the child discovers that language can take the place of shared experience. In early child language development, narrative is a form of dialogue, verbalization of shared experience so it can become part of a shared construction of reality. Examples are drawn from interactions of a young child with his parents. (MSE)

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THE PLACE OF DIALOGUE IN CHILDREN'S CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

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THE PLACE OF DIALOGUE IN CHILDREN'S CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

M.A.K. Halliday

Much of the discussion of children's language development in the last quarter of a century, especially in educational contexts, has been permeated by a particular ideological construction of childhood. This view combines individualism, romanticism, and what Martin calls 'childism': the disneyfied vision of a child that is constructed in the media and in certain kinds of 'kiddie lit'.[1] Each child is presented as a freestanding autonomous being; and learning consists in releasing and bringing into flower the latent awareness that is already there in the bud. This is the view that was embodied in the 'creativity' and 'personal growth' models of education by James Britton, John Dixon and David Holbrook in Great Britain; and more recently, from another standpoint, in the United States in Donald Graves' conception of children's writing as process and of their text as property to be individually owned.[2] It has been supported theoretically first by Chomskyan innatism and latterly by cognitive science models which interpret learning as the acquisition of readymade information by some kind of independent processing device.[3]

What these various discourses have in common is that they are all essentially antisocial -- or perhaps 'asocial', to be more accurate. In this they contrast with interpretations of development and learning that would make reference to Vygotsky, to Bernstein and, in linguistics, to the functional, social-semantic tradition that derives from European scholarship, especially the Prague and London schools, from glossematics, and from the American anthropological linguists.[4] In this view meaning is a social and cultural phenomenon and all construction of meaning is a social process. We can use the term 'intersubjective' for it provided we do not take this to imply that the 'subject' comes into existence first and then proceeds to interact with other subjects. There is no subject until construed by social meaning-making practices.[5]

In studying child language development some twenty years ago I was struck by how clearly this social-semantic perspective stands out once you observe how children begin to communicate -- especially if you observe it from birth and in a natural form, without eliciting or experimenting and without using too many technical aids. These practices tend to obscure the social nature of semiotic development, whereas the traditional diary method of child language studies brings it out. In this context, some fairly clearly defined developmental stages seemed to me to emerge:[6]

(1)	pre-symbolic ('primary intersubjectivity')	typically birth - 0;5
(1/2)	transition to:	,, 0;5 - 0;8
(2)	symbolic: protolinguistic ('secondary intersubjectivity')	,, 0;8 - 1;4
(2/3)	transition to:	,, 1;4 - 2;0
(3)	symbolic: linguistic	,, 2;0 -

Since I was focussing specifically on the development of language I concentrated on the last three, referring to them as 'phases':

(2) symbolic: protolinguistic	=	Phase I, 'protolanguage'
(2/3) transition	=	Phase II, 'transition'
(3) symbolic: linguistic	=	Phase III, 'language'

Since then detailed studies of early language development have been carried out in comparable terms, based on intensive observation of children in their home, by Clare Painter and by Jane Oldenburg; and Qiu Shijin has observed a population of Chinese children living in Shanghai, over a short period but covering different ages within the range. All have used the same theoretical framework for their interpretations.[7]

From the beginning of life a child's acts of meaning are joint constructions, dialogically enacted between himself and some 'significant other' by reference to whom he is achieving a personal identity. Colwyn Trevarthen documented this process for the pre-symbolic stage many years ago when he showed that a newborn infant within two or three weeks of birth takes part in exchanging attention.[8] This exchange of attention is the beginning of language. It has no 'content', in the adult sense; but it has meaning. For the child, the meaning is 'we are together, and in communication; there is a "you" -- and a "me"'. 'You' and 'me' are, of course, mutually defining; neither can exist without the other. I shall not dwell on this stage here; but I have found it fascinating to take part in, and been amazed by the semogenic potential of these early microencounters. They are not entirely without content, as a matter of fact; but there is as yet no systematic construing of experience.

When the child begins to control his material environment, typically at round about 4 - 5 months, he begins the transition to systematic symbolic construction. He can reach out and grasp an object that is in view; and this coincides with his first symbolic encounter with the environment, which takes the form of an act of meaning that is something like 'that's interesting! -- what is it?'. This introduces a 'third person' into the protoconversation alongside the 'you' and the 'me'. The act itself may take any accessible form (my own subject Nigel produced a high-pitched squeak) --

anything which can engage the child and the other in shared attention to some third party. This third party, that is construed as 'neither you nor me', is typically not, in fact, an object but a happening -- a commotion of some kind like a sudden noise or a bright light coming in to the child's attention. But the act of meaning is clearly addressed; the meaning is jointly constructed, and the material phenomenon is construed as experience only through the shared act of exchanging a symbol. The mother, of course, or whoever is sharing in the act, responds in her own tongue; she says 'yes, those were pigeons', or 'that's a bus', or 'see, they've put the lights on'. But the semogenic process is dialogic, in two distinct respects: on the one hand interpersonally, in that the two acts define each other as question and answer, and on the other hand experientially, in that some kind of perturbation in the environment is construed dialogically as a phenomenon of experience. In other words it is through language that this 'third party' acquires the status of reality.

The child is also at the same time construing his own body; the first symbolic construction of self versus environment coincides more or less with the first construction of this same opposition in material terms. What is 'out there' is what can be grasped, 'grasping' being both a material process and a process of consciousness. But it has to be actively explored, on both these planes; and the transition to the systematic symbolic stage, that of the protolanguage, takes place only after the child has learnt that he can detach himself from the material environment (by rolling over). This protolanguage phase, that of 'secondary intersubjectivity', is then reached, typically at somewhere between seven and ten months of age, through a change in both forms of his dialogue with the environment. On the one hand, in his bodily engagement the child learns to propel himself from one place to another, by some form of crawling. He now has the freedom of space-time; and at the same time he achieves the semiotic freedom of construing meanings into systems -- that is, on both planes he achieves paradigmatic choice. This choice of meaning is the essential characteristic of protolanguage.

Protolanguage is the form of language that we humans share with what we think of as the 'higher' mammals: mainly primates and cetaceans, but it also appears in our two most favoured pets, cats and dogs, at least when they interact with us. All these are of course different languages; but all have the same formal structure, as systems of simple signs. In the process of his symbolic activity, the child construes meaning into systems; and the systems are functional in different contexts -- I referred to these as 'microfunctions' in my analysis. The process is of course dialogic; the others share in construing the meaning potential. In this protolinguistic

phase we can see clearly how meaning is created at the point of impact of the material and the conscious, in the dialectic engagement between these two domains of experience. Consider a typical protolinguistic dialogue such as the following:

[Mother is holding child in her lap, throwing his toy rabbit in the air and catching it. The child is watching attentively.]

Child: [ə ə]

Mother: There he goes!

Child: [ə ə ə]

Mother: Oh you want me to throw him up again do you? -- all right. There he goes!

Child: [loudly] [m͡nŋ]

Mother: No, that's enough. Let's find something else to do.

Here the material processes taking place in space-time (the mother throwing up the rabbit and catching it) impact on the conscious processes whereby both parties are attending, with shared positive affect, both to the other and to the third party, the rabbit-commotion. It is the interpenetration of these two that generates a meaning, such as 'that's fun; I want you to do it again'; and also a contrasting meaning of 'I insist that you do it again!'. These evolve dialogically as part of a shared system of meanings in different microcontexts, which includes others such as 'I want / don't want that object', 'let's be (you and me) together / let's attend to this (third party) together', 'I like / am curious about that' and so on.

It is in protolanguage, then, that the activity of meaning comes to be construed in the form of a system, such that there is an ongoing dialectic relationship between the system and the instance. The system is the potential for generating instances; and by the same token each new instance perturbs the system.[9] The system is a dynamic open system, metastable in character, that persists only through constantly changing in interaction with its environment; and each new instance constitutes an incursion from the environment, since the material conditions that engender it are never totally identical. (We may note that this impacting of the conscious with the material takes place at both 'ends' of the symbolic process, the semantic and the phonetic; so that the system is evolving at both these interfaces, both in the construction of content and in the construction of expression. In the latter, the material conditions are those of the child's own body, his physiological potential -- which also, of course, is constantly changing.)

The second major transition is that from protolanguage into language -- into the distinctively human semiotic that is not, as far as we know, shared

by other species. In the course of this transition the resource for making meaning is further transformed, this time into a system of another, significantly different kind. In the context of overall development, while protolanguage goes with crawling, language goes with walking; and both these activities are carried out by specialized organs -- mouth and legs -- leaving arms and hands free for other purposes. But the criterial, and critical, difference between protolanguage and language is that language is stratified: that is, it has a grammar. A grammar (strictly, 'lexicogrammar': syntax, vocabulary, morphology if any) is a purely symbolic system that is introduced 'in between' the content and the expression; that is, it is a distinct level of semiotic organization located between the two material interfaces. Unlike a protolanguage, a language cannot be described as a system of signs; it is a system based on the more complex principle of realization, which cannot be reduced to pairs of 'signifiant / signifié'. The grammar thus does not interface directly with either material environment. But at the same time it is not neutral between the two; it is biassed towards the content plane. The grammar is a 'natural' grammar which has evolved as the primary means for construing experience and enacting social processes -- still, of course, in dialogic contexts.

Only a system that is stratified in this way can construe meaning in the form of 'information' -- as a specifically linguistic commodity that can be exchanged, on the model of the exchange of goods-&-services that evolves with protolanguage. Without a grammar there can be no information. Once a grammar has evolved, I can tell you things and we can argue about them. The critical final step leading to the joint construction of information is the complex one of arguing about: the combination of mood with transitivity, in grammatical terms. But the child cannot reach this point in one giant leap. Let us try to enumerate the main steps in his progress.

It seems that children have a favourite strategy for achieving the transition from child tongue to mother tongue. It may be universal, or some aspects of it may be; and it may well have been the course taken by language in its evolution. The grammar makes it possible to construe experience, through the system of transitivity and its lexical counterpart in naming.[10] But at the same time, because the grammar is a purely abstract system at one remove from the material interfaces it also makes it possible simultaneously to construe two contrasting dialogic modes (when they become grammaticalized we know them as 'moods'): the imperative, or 'pragmatic' mode, meaning 'this is how things should be; you bring them about!', and the declarative, or 'mathetic' mode, meaning 'this is how things are; you can check whether you agree'. Early examples of pragmatic utterances from my records were:

water ón 'turn the water on!' squeeze órange 'squeeze an orange!'
get dówn 'I want to get down!' play tráin 'let's play with the train!'

All had rising tone, and demanded a response. Contrast these with mathetic utterances such as the following, all on falling tone:

big bàll 'that's a big ball' new rècord 'here's a new record'
red swèater 'I've got my red sweater' two hàmmer 'I'm holding two hammers'

These were from 1;7. A later example shows the the two modes in syntagmatic sequence (1;9):

no room walk on wàll ... walk on óther wall 'there's no room to walk on (this) wall; I want to walk on the other wall!'

The three English-speaking children who were recorded intensively by natural language diaries all made this distinction systematically as the primary semantic option in the protolanguage - language transition. All three expressed it prosodically, by intonation and / or voice quality; and in all three the pragmatic was the marked option. The Chinese-speaking children also made it, and also expressed it prosodically; however there was not enough data to establish the markedness pattern.[11]

The pragmatic is a demand for goods-&-services; it seeks a response, in the form of action, and the 'others' involved in the dialogue recognize and construe it as such (unconsciously of course). That does not mean that they always accede to the request; but they show that they have got the message, and in that respect 'no' is as effective as 'yes'. Gradually, during the course of the transition, the pragmatic evolves into a demand for information; thus ontogenetically (and perhaps also phylogenetically) the interrogative, although in the adult grammar it pairs with the declarative, is derived by splitting off from the imperative -- a demand for action becomes a demand for verbal action. The mathetic, on the other hand, does not demand any action. What it does do is invite confirmation: 'yes that's a big ball', 'it's not a big ball; it's a little ball', 'it's not a ball; it's a melon', and so on. And here an important question arises: what is the essential condition for entering in to a dialogue of this kind, in which one interactant corroborates, or disputes, what the other one has just said. It is that the experience must have been shared, You cannot corroborate or dispute what happened unless you also were there to see it.

Thus the basic form of information is turning shared experience into meaning: that is, telling someone something that they already know. I can construe an experience semiotically, and offer the construction to you, provided I know that you have shared the experience; and you then share in

construing it. Thus the construction is again dialogic: meaning is created by the impact between a material phenomenon and the shared processes of consciousness of those who participated in it.

Every parent is familiar with the situation where their child is asked to give information to someone about an experience that person has not shared, and the child is unable to do it. Mother has taken the child to the zoo; when she comes home she says 'Tell Daddy what you saw at the zoo today'. Daddy is attending; but the child cannot oblige -- either he remains silent, or he turns back to Mummy and tells her. Why? Because she was the one with whom he shared the experience. How can he tell Daddy about it, when Daddy wasn't there?

Conversation, then, evolves as the joint construal of shared experience, whereby phenomena that are accessible to the consciousness of both parties -- things both can see, events both have experienced -- are turned dialogically into meanings. This is how conversation begins; and how it continues, for a child, until he is well on the way from protolanguage to mother tongue. No doubt conversation continued in that way for many generations in the history of the human species, before its further potential was taken up. But the potential is there once the system of meaning-making is in place: this is what enables the listener to construe phenomena that only the speaker has actually witnessed. And in the course of time each child makes this same discovery: that language can create information -- it can take the place of shared experience. It is not necessary for the listener to have been there and seen the thing too; the experience can be reconstrued out of the language. This is such a major discovery that Nigel, at least, consistently used a different grammar for the two situations: he had one form for 'I'm telling you something we shared', which was his original context for giving information, and another form for 'I'm telling you something that happened, even though you weren't there to see it'. This grammatical distinction is not made in the adult language, so after a few months Nigel gave it up. We do not distinguish between telling people what (we think) they know and telling them what (we think) they don't know; the declarative covers both. But at the same time, we do not stop using language in the earlier way. In communication models the concept of information is usually taken to imply that knowledge is being transmitted from a knower to a non-knower: 'I know something which you don't know; I "mean" it, and as a result you now know it'. Where this happens , language is operating as a surrogate for shared experience: a way of sharing semiotically what has not been shared materially. Prototypically this is monologic, since only the knower takes part in

transforming it into meaning. But it is mainly in rather specialized uses of language, like an academic lecture, that information is constructed and imparted in this monologic way. Most of the time when we are in the indicative mood we are construing meanings interactively on the basis of shared experience. The prototypical form of this process is the dialogic one, in which the construction proceeds by argument. Arguing is the shared construction of experiential meaning; it occupies the space from consensus to conflict, and interactants will typically move between the two as they extend their dialogue into conversation.[12]

In Learning How to Mean I gave an example of the joint construction of narrative in a dialogue between Nigel and his parents, when Nigel was 1;8. Nigel had been taken to the zoo, and had picked up a lid from a plastic cup which he was clutching in one hand while stroking a goat with the other hand. The goat started to eat the lid; the keeper intervened, saying that the goat shouldn't eat the lid -- it wasn't good for it. Some hours later, back home. Nigel recalled the incident:

Nigel: try eat lìd
Father: What tried to eat the lid?
Nigel: [repeating] try eat lìd
Father: What tried to eat the lid?
Nigel: goàt ... man said nò ... goat try eat lìd ... man said nò

A few hours later again he returned to the story, this time with his mother:

Nigel: goat try eat lìd ... man said nò
Mother: Why did the man say no?
Nigel: goat shòuldn't eat lid ... [shaking head] goòdfor it
Mother: The goat shouldn't eat the lid; it's not good for it.
Nigel: goat try eat lìd ... man said nò ... goat shòuldn't eat lid ... [shaking head] goòdfor it

We tend to think of narrative and dialogue as opposed forms of discourse; but this type of text suggests that in its early development narrative itself is dialogic. The material experience had been shared between child and parents; the child then takes the initiative in verbalizing it so that it becomes part of a shared construction of reality. The parents join in, their turns taking the form of questions; but these are not simply interpersonal prompts -- since they are WH-type questions, they contain experiential information:

'What tried to eat the lid?' -- there was a doer (grammatically an Actor); you identify it.

'Why did the man say no?' -- there was a reason (grammatically some expression of cause); you identify it.

Thus there is joint participation in the construing of this experience.

We may compare this with the accompanying sequence of texts (A 1 - A 9) taken from the record of conversations over a period of about eight months, when Nigel is 2;10 - 3;6. These are not narratives of events, but rather the ongoing construction of a general concept, in this case that of 'cats'. The child is older now, and in these instances he is asking the questions; many of these are yes / no questions, but there are also WH - questions of 'how?' and 'why?'. In both types, of course, the child is also contributing information:

'Do cats like meat / bones / marrow?' -- constructing and testing out a taxonomy of potential foods.

'How do the cat's claws come out?' -- they come out and go in again.

'Does it go with (= walk on) its claws?' -- they come out and go in in different contexts and functions.

But the conversations achieve much more than that. Experientially, for example, the dialogue constructs the general taxonomy of plants and animals ('things that grow' versus 'things that go'); compare the complex argument around a four-way distinction of cats, puppets, people and trains at 3;6. Interpersonally, it evolves into a dynamic modelling of question, answer, challenge, contradiction and the like, that is the essential component of the resources out of which all conversation is constructed.

I have given various examples elsewhere from my own records;[13] many more will be found in the writings of Oldenburg and Painter (cf. note 7 above), as well as throughout the now extensive literature on child language (but note that very little of this takes any account of protolanguage). It is instructive both to examine single instances and to track conversational motifs through time, as in the cat extracts just cited. For example, in wondering how Nigel had construed his experience of time and space I was able to put together conversational fragments extending over several years; while Joy Phillips, from intensive study of the earlier data, showed how he had developed the fundamental semantic strategies of comparison and contrast. And the extraordinarily rich body of natural conversation between mothers and their children of 3½ - 4 that Ruqaiya Hasan has assembled, which is reported on briefly in her paper in the present volume, adds a significant new dimension to our understanding of the development of dialogue. In all these early discourses we see clearly how the text interacts with its environment, such that meaning is created at the intersection of two contradictions: the experiential one, between the material and the conscious modes of experience, and the interpersonal one, between the different personal histories of the interactants taking part. Thus from the ontogenesis of conversation we can gain insight into human learning and human understanding.

The construction of 'cats' [Nigel from 2;10 to 3;6]

from M.A.K. Halliday, Listening to Nigel (University of Sydney, 1984)

Text A 1: Nigel at 2;10;22
Nigel: And you (= 'I') saw a cat in Chania Falls.
Mother: Yes, you saw a cat in Chania Falls.
Nigel: And you picked the cat up. Mummy, do cats like meat?
Mother: Yes, they do.
Nigel: Do cats like bones? Do cats like marrow?

Text A 2: Nigel at 2;10;26
Nigel: Can I stroke the cat? You (= 'I') want to stroke the cat ... you want to scratch it ... it's drinking its milk ... it's moving its tail out ... it's moving its tail outside ... it's scratching ...it's putting its tail up ... what's this?
Mother: I don't know; I suppose it's its elbow.
Nigel: It's waggling its tail ... it's lapping it with its tongue ... you can go near its elbow ... you can go near its elbow ... but you can't go too near its face ... because it thinks you might take away its milk ... it was just a bit frightened ... it thinked that you might take away its milk ... has it finished its milk?

Text A 3: Nigel at 2;11;5
Nigel: (thinking about "The house that Jack built") What is a rat?
Father: It's a sort of big mouse.
Nigel: Does the rat go when the cat has killed it?
Father: No, it doesn't go any more then.
Nigel: Why did the cat kill the rat?
Father: Cats do kill rats.
Nigel: Why do they?
Father: (formula) You'll have to wait to understand that till you're a bit bigger.
Nigel: No I can understand it now.
Father: Well, cats just like to eat rats and mice.
Nigel: Why do they like to eat them?
Father: They just do.

Text A 4: Nigel at 2;11;15
Nigel: Why did the cat go out? Mummy, why did the cat go out?
Mother: It gets fed up, having its tail squashed.

Text A 5: Nigel at 3;0;26
Nigel: How do the cat's claws come out?
Father: They come out from inside its paws. Look, I'll show you.
Nigel: Does it go with its claws?
Father: Not if it's going along the ground.
Nigel: And not if it's climbing up a tree.
Father: Yes; if it's climbing up a tree it does go with its claws.

Text A 6: Nigel at 3;2;7
Nigel: Will the cat eat the grape?
Father: I don't think so. Cats like things that go, not things that grow.

Text A 7: Nigel at 3;5;12
Nigel: Cats have no else to stop you from crossing them ... cats have no other way to stop children from hitting them ... so they bite. Cat, don't go away! -- when I come back I'll tell you a story. (He does so)

Text A 8: Nigel at 3;6;12
Nigel: Can I give the cat some artichoke?
Mother: Well she won't like it.
Nigel: Cats like things that go; they don't like things that grow.

Text A 9: Nigel at 3;6;14
Nigel: I wish I was a puppet so that I could go out into the snow in the night. Do puppets like going out in the snow?
Father: I don't know. I don't think they mind.
Nigel: Do cats like going out in the snow?
Father: Cats don't like snow.
Nigel: Do they die? (He knows that some plants do.)
Father: No they don't die; they just don't like it.
Nigel: Why don't puppets mind snow?
Father: Well (hesitating) ... puppets aren't people.
Nigel: Yes but ... cats also aren't people.
Father: No, but cats are alive; they go. Puppets don't go.
Nigel: Puppets do go.
Father: Yes, but you have to make them go; like trains.
Nigel: Trains have wheels. Puppetshave legs.
Father: Yes, they have legs; but the legs don't go all by themselves. You have to make them go.

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NOTES

[1] This ideology is particularly characteristic of what has been called the 'manipulative capitalist' society. See J.R. Martin, Factual Writing: exploring and challenging social reality, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; especially Chapter 4, passim.

[2] See for example John Dixon, Growth Through English, London: Oxford University Press, 1967; Donald Graves, Writing: teachers and children at work, London: Heinemann, 1983. For an excellent critique see Joan Rothery, 'The pedagogies of traditional school grammar, creativity, personal growth, and process', forthcoming.

[3] Cf. Walter Kintsch, 'The role of knowledge in discourse comprehension: a construction - integration model', Psychological Review 95.2, 1988.

[4] Among contemporary linguists an outstanding contributor to the development of this tradition is Claude Hagège. See for example his L'homme de paroles: contribution linguistique aux sciences humaines, Paris: Fayard, 1985.

[5] See Paul Thibault, Social Semiotics as Praxis: text, social meaning making and Nabokov's "Ada", Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, in press.

[6] The initial interpretation of my observations is contained in M.A.K. Halliday, Learning How to Mean: explorations in the development of language, London: Edward Arnold, 1975 (Italian translation by Maria Scati, Lo sviluppo del significato nel bambino, Bologna: Zanichelli, 1980). The data to age 2;7 is available in my Listening to Nigel: conversations of a very small child, Sydney: University of Sydney Linguistics Department, 1984. See also Margaret Bullowa, 'Infants as conversational partners' in Terry Myers (ed.), The Development of Conversation and Discourse, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979.

[7] See Jane Oldenburg, 'Learning the language and learning through language in early childhood' in M.A.K. Halliday, John Gibbons & Howard Nicholas (eds.), Learning, Keeping and Using Language: selected papers from the Eighth World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1990; Clare Painter, Into the Mother Tongue: a case study of early language development, London: Frances Pinter, 1984; Qiu Shijin [surname QIU], 'Transition period in Chinese language development', Australian Review of Applied Linguistics 8.1, 1985.

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[8] Colwyn Trevarthen's important work in this field is presented in a number of his papers; see especially 'Communication and cooperation in early infancy: a description of primary intersubjectivity' in Margaret Bullowa (ed.), Before Speech: the beginning of interpersonal communcation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; and 'The foundations of intersubjectivity: development of interpersonal and cooperative understanding in infants' in David Olson (ed.), The Social Foundations of Language and Thought: essays in honour of Jerome S. Bruner, New York: Norton, 1980. For his work on the protolanguage phase see 'Secondary intersubjectivity: confidence, confiding and acts of meaning in the first year' in Andrew Lock (ed.), Action, Gesture and Symbol: the emergence of language, London: Academic Press, 1978. Bruner's work provides a valuable general theoretical underpinning from a psychological standpoint; compare his chapter 'Early social interaction and language acquisition' in H.R. Shaffer (ed.), Studies in Mother-Infant Interaction, London: Academic Press, 1977.

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[9] Contrast genetically transmitted communication systems (like the dances of bees), where instances do not perturb the system. This fundamental feature of semiotic systems is obscured in adult language by the massive quantitative effects to which it contributes (cf. my 'Language and the order of nature' in Nigel Fabb et al. (eds.), The Linguistics of Writing, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); but it is seen very clearly at the protolanguage phase of development.

For language as dynamic open system, see J.L. Lemke's three articles 'Towards a model of the instructional process', 'The formal analysis of instruction' and 'Action, context and meaning', in J.L. Lemke, Semiotics and Education, Toronto: Victoria University (Toronto Semiotic Circle Monographs, Working Papers and Prepublications), 1984.

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[10] Naming (lexicalized denotation) and transitivity are the cornerstones of the potential of language for construing experience (the experiential metafunction, in the terms of systemic theory). They were first explicitly linked in this way by Mathesius; see for example 'On some problems of the systematic analysis of grammar': Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague 6, 1936. For naming in the development of conversation see my 'Language as code and language as behaviour: a systemic-functional interpretation of the nature and ontogenesis of dialogue' in Robin Fawcett et al. (eds.), The Semiotics of Culture and Language, Volume 1, London: Frances Pinter, 1984.

[11] It may seem surprising that, with children learning a tone language, a major distinction such as this could be realized by intonation. In fact, of course, Chinese uses intonation (grammatical tone) as well as lexical tone; but this is irrelevant. The protolanguage is 'child tongue', not mother tongue; you cannot tell, when a child is speaking protolanguage, what language his mother tongue is going to be, and although by the time children introduce this distinction they are already launched into the mother tongue, this particular contrast is still their own invention.

In some instances, in fact, their system runs counter to the pattern of the mother tongue. Thus in Nigel's grammar proto-imperatives, being pragmatic, were rising in tone, whereas in English the informal imperative is typically falling; while when he first used dependent clauses, which have no macrofunction, he gave them the unmarked (falling) tone. Thus when, at just under 1;9, he said "When New-World finish, song about bús!" ('When the New World (symphony) is finished, sing me the song about a bus') the first clause was falling, the second rising; whereas in adult English the tones would have been the other way round.

[12] From her study of long conversations among groups of adults Suzanne Eggins postulates that it is in fact the periodicity of consensus and conflict that is the major factor in keeping conversations going. See her 'Keeping the conversation going: the dynamics of sustained talk and the definition of conversation', forthcoming.

[13] Cf. my 'Meaning and the construction of reality in early childhood' in Herbert L. Pick Jr. & Elliot Saltzman (eds.), Modes of Perceiving and Processing of Information, Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1978.